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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000927

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS GROUP STANDING UP TO EVO

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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11. (C) Poloffs met with six representatives of the recently formed group "Alianza Plaza Abaroa" (Abaroa Plaza Alliance) on April 14. The Alliance is a newly formed political movement comprised mostly of middle-class La Paz residents. They claim their primary objective is to stand for the protection of democracy, democratic institutions, freedom of expression, and freedom to dissent. The Alliance boasts of a membership of several thousand, but accurate figures are not available. Alliance members assert that President Evo Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) has violated the fundamental democratic principals which their group espouses. The Alliance's presence indicates that Morales' middle class support in La Paz has eroded considerably since his election in December 2005. End Summary.

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History  
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12. (SBU) The Alliance represents a united front of four smaller groups -- Basta Ya!, Pacenos Por La Paz, Pensar Diferente and Unete Bolivia )- that grew out of a series of recent peaceful rallies in support of democracy and against the heavy-handed tactics of Evo Morales' government. The most recent event that galvanized the Alliance occurred March 6 in La Paz' Plaza Abaroa. That night, university students organized a small peaceful protest against Evo Morales' government. The Alianza states it had about 2000 protesters at the square. The event turned violent when a MAS-affiliated mob disrupted the gathering. The MAS mob was carrying sticks, whips, and rocks, which they threw at the protesters. In response to the mayhem the police tear gassed the crowd and brought in water cannons.

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13. (C) While the Alliance representatives acknowledged that none of them supported the MAS, they were quick to point out that their group is non-partisan. They frequently repeated that their main objective was not/not Evo's ouster, only that Evo respect democratic principals, democratic institutions and freedom of expression. The six argued that Bolivia's "traditional" political parties (such as MNR, MIR, ADN and PODEMOS) have all been discredited to the point of irrelevance. The group noted that the heads of Bolivia's traditional political parties for years failed to cultivate a new generation of leaders because of their egotism and out of concern that someone might challenge their authority. They stressed that they do not see any national or regional leaders that have a vision which the Alliance could endorse. They specifically mentioned that PODEMOS leader Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga and National Unity (UN) Party leader Samuel Doria Medina lack the credibility to represent a viable alternative to President Morales.

14. (C) One of the Alliance's biggest frustrations is that La Paz city (and more specifically the La Paz middle class) lacks political representation. The Alliance members told poloffs that Evo's party takes La Paz for granted because La Paz and its neighboring city of El Alto routinely poll very high (70 to 80 percent) in favor of the MAS. The group asserted that support for the MAS in La Paz is eroding quickly, while in El Alto fissures are starting to emerge. They argued, however, that the La Paz middle class is now decidedly anti-MAS even if most in the middle class is not vocally critical. Alliance members asserted that most Pacenos (La Paz residents) fear being "blacklisted" and retribution if they openly criticize the MAS.

Demographics and Outreach

15. (C) The Alliance leadership that met with poloffs consisted of three women (Fernanda San Martin, Carola Antezana, Claudia Bravo) and three men (Guillermo Cuentas, Guillermo Paz and Rodrigo Pero). The six (all light-skinned/European in appearance) acknowledged that they are fighting against an iconic image in Evo Morales ) the self-proclaimed first indigenous President. Nonetheless, they argued the Alliance is compromised of all types of Bolivians, not just light-skinned Bolivians such as themselves. In fact, the peace protesters in the Plaza Abaroa on March 6 looked more like Evo Morales than the six Alliance leaders.

16. (C) The leadership explained that the Alliance remains a small but growing La Paz phenomenon, but it has aspirations to expand into other areas. The group claimed to be reaching out to moderate groups in El Alto, but recognized that penetrating El Alto will be difficult. (Note: On April 16, poloff met with an El Alto leader who is collaborating with the Alliance. End Note). Their philosophy is to target the 15 to 20 percent of Altenos (according to public opinion polls) who currently reject Evo Morales' policies. The group argued that the 15 to 20 percent can serve as a vanguard of El Alto opinion changers. They also stated that many more Altenos actually do not care for Evo but are afraid to express their opinion, or they see no viable alternative to the President. (Note: Many Embassy Contacts in El Alto tell us the same thing. End Note). The Alliance also has connections with university groups in the opposition-led "media-luna" departments (states) of Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija. Some of the Alliance's member groups also have had contact with opposition groups in Venezuela.

Communication and Future Plans

17. (C) The Alliance leadership states it uses the Internet,

text messaging and cellular phones to communicate with its steadily growing membership. Facebook and email have become the medium of choice. The group asserted that some 8000 Facebook users have expressed interest in their movement. The Alliance's entire senior leadership attempts to meet at least once a week, but the leaders meet or communicate in small gatherings quite frequently (daily).

18. (C) The Alliance currently has no plans to form a political party, but it does plan to hold more rallies and start implementing projects. Currently the group is focused on working out its organizational structure. Once its structure is complete, the group wants to develop training seminars on leadership and conflict management.

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Comment  
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19. (C) The Abaroa Plaza Alliance today does not currently represent a challenge to the Morales government, but it does demonstrate that some in the silent La Paz middle class are now willing to speak-out on what they view as Evo's assault on Bolivian democracy. It remains to be seen if the Alliance can emerge into a full-fledged political movement. Nonetheless, the Alliance's very presence indicates that the La Paz middle class - a group that in sizable numbers voted for Evo in December 2005 primarily to stop Bolivia's political turmoil ) are increasingly disenchanted with Evo Morales government. End Comment.  
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